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**Subject:** EDF blog post: A full month after West Virginia spill, many questions linger ... along with the chemical's distinctive odor

Full post at <http://blogs.edf.org/health/>.

## A full month after West Virginia spill, many questions linger ... along with the chemical's distinctive odor

By [Richard Denison](#) | [Bio](#) | Published: February 9, 2014

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Today marks exactly a month since what is now said to be 10,000 gallons of “crude MCHM” – mixed with what was later found to have included other chemicals – spilled into West Virginia’s Elk River, contaminated 1,700 miles of piping in the water distribution system for nine counties, and disrupted the lives of hundreds of thousands of the state’s residents.

Despite declining levels of the chemical in the water being fed into the distribution system, late this past week five area schools were closed due to detection of the distinctive licorice-like odor of MCHM and multiple reports of symptoms such as eye irritation, nausea and dizziness among students and staff.

The [latest sampling data](#) (for February 7 and 8) at locations such as area fire hydrants and hospitals and at schools shows that MCHM is at non-detect levels (<10 parts per billion) in most samples, but the chemical is still being detected in a minority of the samples despite extensive flushing. Despite repeated calls to do so, officials appear to have yet to conduct any sampling of taps in residents’ homes.

This past week also featured a press conference by state and federal officials seeking to explain their response to the spill (a video of the entire press conference is [available in four parts here](#); it’s worth watching).

*Today’s Charleston Gazette* features the latest in a long series of outstanding front-line reports by Ken Ward, Jr., and his colleagues, who have closely followed every twist and turn of both the spill and the government’s response to it. Today’s article makes clear the extent to which federal officials were winging it in the hours and days after the spill was discovered as they rushed to set a “safe” level for MCHM in tap water.

In this post I'll delve a little deeper into CDC's rush to set the "safe" level and the many ways in which CDC inadequately accounted for major data gaps and uncertainties. I'll end by saying what I think CDC should have done instead. [Read More »](#)

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